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ABSTRACT

This workbook is designed to assist educators in establishing a team for planning for paraeducator supports and addressing paraeducator issues. Worksheets are provided for implementing the following 10 planning steps: (1) inform the local school board of the intention to establish a team to address paraeducator issues; (2) ensure that the team includes the appropriate members of the school and community; (3) have the team assess their own status and fact-find in relation to the six paraeducator topics: acknowledging, orienting and training, hiring and assigning, interacting with others, roles and responsibilities, and supervising and evaluating; (4) prioritize and select topics ands specific issues that reflect areas of need within the school that the team will work on first; (5) update the local school board on the team's ranked priorities; (6) design a plan to address the team's ranked priorities; (7) identify local, regional, and statewide resources to assist in achieving team plans; (8) implement the team's plans; (9) evaluate the plan's impact and decide on next steps; and (10) report impact and needs to the local school board. (Contains 18 references.) (CR)

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A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports

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January 2001

IDEAs that Work

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

Name of School, City/Town, State

Name of Administrator Responsible for Plan

phone fax email

EC 308411

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Throughout this document you will notice that we have used the term "paraeducator" to refer to individuals who are trained to work with, and alongside, educators in classrooms and other educational settings to support the education of students with and without disabilities in a variety of capacities (e.g., physically, socially, instructionally). Paraeducators are school employees who, while not hired to work in the capacity of a professional position (e.g., teacher, special educator, related services provider), do provide important supportive services in schools under the direction and supervision of qualified school personnel. We recognize that the terms used to refer to these school personnel vary widely and often are used interchangeably (e.g., teacher assistant, teacher aide, instructional assistant, program assistant, educational technician, job coach). Individuals with these various job titles are referred to in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as "paraprofessionals." We support the use of locally adopted job titles that are descriptive of the work done by these school personnel and which are designed to establish or increase respect for individuals who are providing these vital educational supports to students.

IDEAs that Work

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

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Thanks are extended to the Paraeducator Planning Teams at Essex Elementary School, Founders Memorial School, Essex Middle School, and Essex Junction High School for field-testing earlier versions of this guide.

General Directions & Tips

- This guide is meant to be used as a workbook. Please write in it, add to it, or change the wording. Feel free to adapt it in ways that make sense to you and your team. In other words, make it your own!

- Teams that have field-tested this guide have found that it works best to meet regularly to get things accomplished. If you have too much time between meetings, things tend to get bogged down.

- Some teams have found it helpful to get input from people beyond their planning team, particularly in reference to Step 3. They have gathered peoples' perspectives in a variety of ways such as, talking to people directly, by email, or through questionnaires.

- While team members may each have copies of this guide book to refer to, we suggest you maintain a master version of this guide book to record the activities and work of your team.

- At your team meetings, we suggest that you practice collaborative teamwork principles by establishing an agenda and rotating roles (e.g., facilitator, recorder, time keeper). During meetings it also can be helpful to record information and ideas publicly on large chart paper or on overhead transparencies made from the forms in this guide book. This can help focus the work of the group visually and conceptually.

Summary of Team Activities

PLANNING STEPS	Person(s) Responsible	Date Initiated	Date Completed
1. Inform your local school board of your intention to establish a team, or use an existing team, to address paraeducator issues			
2. Ensure that the team includes the appropriate members of the school and local community			
3. Have the team assess their own status and fact-find in relation to the six paraeducator topics: a. Acknowledging b. Orienting & Training c. Hiring & Assigning d. Interactions with Others e. Roles & Responsibilities f. Supervision & Evaluation			
4. Prioritize and select topics and specific issues that reflect areas of need within the school that the team will work on first			
5. Update your local school board of the team's ranked priorities			
6. Design a plan to address the team's ranked priorities			
7. Identify local, regional, and statewide resources to assist in achieving team plans			
8. Implement the team's plans			
9. Evaluate the plan's impact and plan next steps			
10. Report impact and needs to your local school board			

1. Inform your local school board of your intention to establish a team, or use an existing team, to address paraeducator issues

Suggested "To Do's"

Informing your school board should help raise awareness about the importance of paraeducator issues as they relate to the educational needs of all students. Talk to school and community members to identify concerns and determine the level of interest in addressing paraeducator issues.

People to contact:

Outline a rationale highlighting the importance of addressing paraeducator issues within the context of overall school improvement planning.

List some of the key reasons:

Consider possibilities for embedding paraeducator planning within ongoing school improvement efforts (e.g., existing teams) or for establishing a team dedicated primarily to paraeducator issues.

List options and rationales:

Make arrangements to inform your local school board.

How will the board be informed (e.g., in person, in writing)?

Who will inform the school board?

When?

2. Ensure that the team includes the appropriate members of the school and local community

Suggested "To Do's"

Try to maintain a workable team size of 5 to 8 people who represent different constituencies (e.g., parents, students, teachers, special educators, school administrators, paraeducators, community members). Enlist people who have different experiences. For example, you may want a paraeducator who is assigned to a classroom and another who is assigned to an individual student. You will want people who have experience working with various types of students. Because the issues addressed through this planing are so important to paraeducators, sometimes the teams include a disproportionate number of paraeducators. Be aware of balancing the team's membership. Also, be aware that because of the time commitment involved in this type of planing, you may have to go the extra mile to involve people and keep them involved. Consider supports for parents such as child care, meeting times, and transportation. Consider supports for school personnel such as release time, comp time, or compensation for hourly employees.

Our Paraeducator Team Members:

	Name	Constituency Represented	Phone
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

3. Have the team assess their own status and fact-find in relation to the six paraeducator topics:

Self-Assessment

As a team: (a) rate your school's performance on each numbered statement (1-28); and (b) rate your school's performance on each of the six areas major headings (A-F). List additional relevant facts you already have or need to get.

A.	Check one box for each statement: Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Acknowledging Paraeducators				
1. Paraeducators should be considered members of the educational teams corresponding to their work assignments. These teams typically consist of the student (when appropriate), the student's parents, teachers, special educators, and others as needed on an ongoing or situational basis (e.g., related services providers, school nurse, bus driver, older mentors with the same disability as the student).				
2. Paraeducators provide important services, under the supervision of a licensed educator, that influence student learning, social/emotional development, and inclusion.				
3. Paraeducators should be valued, appreciated, and recognized for their unique competencies, hard work, and contributions to the classroom, school, and community.				

Other Relevant Facts:

Source: Giangreco, CichoskiKelly, Backus, Edelman, Tucker, Broer, CichoskiKelly & Spinney (1999).

B.	Check one box for each statement			
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Orienting & Training Paraeducators				
4. Paraeducators should receive orientation (e.g., information about the student, classroom, and school) and entry-level training prior to working directly with students (e.g., teamwork, inclusive education, roles and responsibilities of team members, principles of learning).				
5. Paraeducators should receive ongoing, on-the-job, training to match their specific job responsibilities and assignments.				
6. Paraeducators should have access to ongoing learning opportunities, in addition to their on-the-job experiences (e.g., workshops, courses, internet study) that promote their skill development in relevant areas (e.g., supporting students with challenging behaviors; approaches to literacy; use of technology; needs of students with low incidence disabilities) and have input into what training they need.				
7. Paraeducator training experiences should be designed to allow individuals to gain continuing education or college/university credit.				
Other Relevant Facts:				

C.	Check one box for each statement			
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Hiring & Assigning Paraeducators				
8. Practices should be established to recruit, hire, and retain paraeducators.				
9. Substitute paraeducators should be recruited and trained to ensure that a student's access to education and participation in his/her educational program is not unduly disrupted when the regular paraeducator is unavailable due to occurrences such as illness, injury, personal leave, or professional development.				
10. Each school should have an agreed upon team process and criteria for determining whether paraeducator support is needed for students with disabilities to receive an appropriate education.				
11. When paraeducator support is determined to be necessary for a student, a written plan should explicitly clarify the nature and extent of the support and explain how it is referenced to the student's educational program (e.g., IEP goals, general education curriculum).				
12. In most circumstances it is advisable to assign paraeducators to classrooms or instructional programs rather than to an individual student. In the rare cases when a paraeducator is needed for an individual student, efforts should be made to ensure that paraeducators provide supportive, rather than primary or exclusive, services.				

	Check one box for each statement			
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Hiring & Assigning Paraeducators (continued)				
13. When administrators are making work assignments and reassignments to meet students' educational needs, it is advisable to gain input directly from paraeducators and other team members (e.g., parents, teachers, special educators, related services providers) to understand factors that may influence job performance, job satisfaction, and reduce burnout (e.g., variety of duties, interpersonal dynamics, individual skills and interests, longevity with a particular student).				
14. Paraeducators should have an accurate job description that outlines their roles and responsibilities. This job description should be commensurate with the paraeducator's skill level as it pertains to students both with and without disabilities.				
15. Paraeducators should be compensated in accordance with their level of education, training, experience, and skills.				

Other Relevant Facts:

D.	Check one box for each statement			
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Paraeducator Interactions with Students & Staff				
16. Paraeducators are expected to demonstrate constructive interpersonal skills with students and other team members (e.g., use respectful communication when speaking with or about others; maintain confidentiality; ensure dignity when providing personal care).				
17. Paraeducators should develop and demonstrate attitudes and work habits that encourage: student independence; foster appropriate interdependence; promote inclusion and peer interactions; enhance each students' self-image; and prevent the unintended negative effects often associated with the potential over involvement and proximity of adults.				

Other Relevant Facts:

E.	Check one box for each statement			
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Roles & Responsibilities of Paraeducators				
18. Within the classroom, on a day-to-day basis, the classroom teacher is the instructional leader and interacts directly on an ongoing basis with students who have disabilities. Paraeducators function as a vital support to students under the direction of the teacher and special educators.				
19. Teachers, special educators, and related services providers (e.g., speech/language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologists) have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the appropriate design, implementation, and evaluation of instruction carried out by paraeducators.				
20. Paraeducators should be informed about the educational needs (e.g., IEP goals and objectives; components of the general education curriculum) and characteristics of the students with whom they work, as well as classroom and school practices and routines.				
21. Paraeducators should have opportunities to contribute to the development of the educational program, instructional plans, and activities created by each student's educational team, but should not be given sole responsibility for these and related activities.				

	Check one box for each statement			
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Roles & Responsibilities of Paraeducators (continued)				
22. Some of the functions of paraeducators are to: support the implementation of instructional programs; facilitate learning activities; collect student data; and carry out other assigned duties (e.g., supervise students at lunch or recess; provide personal care supports to students; do clerical tasks) based on plans developed by the teachers and special educators.				
23. Times and mechanisms should be established to allow opportunities for paraeducators to be oriented to teacher's plans, report on student progress, ask questions, and offer their perspectives.				

Other Relevant Facts:

F.	Check one box for each statement			
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Supervision & Evaluation of Paraeducator Services				
24. Paraeducators should receive ongoing supervision and regular performance evaluations which are based on their job descriptions and apply clearly defined processes and procedures.				
25. Supervisors of paraeducators (e.g., teachers; special educators) should be trained in effective supervisory practices through preservice, inservice, or graduate training.				
26. Paraeducator services should be considered in school and district-level school improvement action-planning to ensure that appropriate services are available and effectively utilized.				
27. When a student is receiving support from a paraeducator, an evaluation plan should be established to determine, if possible, how and when paraeducator services can be faded through increased student independence or replaced by more naturally occurring supports (e.g., classroom teacher, peers).				
28. School districts should develop ways to evaluate the impact of paraeducator services on individual students, classrooms, and staff.				
Other Relevant Facts:				

4. Prioritize and select topics and specific issues that reflect areas of need within the school that the team will work on first

- Base priority selections on your team's self-assessment ratings from Step 3, other relevant facts, and agreed upon criteria (e.g., importance, cost, simplicity, time to enact, number of people affected).
- Below, list a maximum of five items from the 28 items included in Step 3 that reflect your team's priorities. Feel free to reword the items in ways that make sense to your team.
- **CIRCLE** a subset of the ranked items that your team proposes to work on first. You can begin by working on any number of priorities. Since some priorities are more complex than others, select what you think you can reasonably accomplish in a specified time period (e.g., the school year).

Our top 5 priorities are:

Rank	Item # and description (from Step 3)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

5. Update your local school board of the team's ranked priorities

Suggested "To Do's"

- As a team, make a decision about whether this is an appropriate time in the process to inform your local school board about your team's self-assessment and ranked priorities. Depending on your school, this could be an important step in keeping the board informed, especially since there may come a point when the board may be asked to take actions (e.g., consider policy changes, make budget adjustments).

- If your team decides this is the right time to update your local school board, decide:

  How will the team communicate with the board (e.g., copy of ranked priorities, written report, presentation)?
  Specify here:

  Who will prepare written materials or give the presentation?
  List names of designated team members here:

  When will the information be shared?
  Date:

- If your team decides this is **not** the right time to update your local school board, decide who might be appropriate to update (e.g., school committees) and when.
  What other groups:

  Date:

6. Design a plan to address the team's ranked priorities

Suggested "To Do's"

Try to avoid reinventing the wheel. Find out if there are existing options, successfully used in other schools, that your team should consider adopting or adapting. Check www.uvm.edu/~uapvt/parasupport/sharedindex.html *If so, proceed to Plan of Action (p. 20).*

If no suitable options are identified, your team may need to **invent something customized.** Because the use of paraeducators to support a full range of students with disabilities within general education is a relatively new practice, there may be a somewhat limited set of existing options from which to select. The good news is that this is fertile ground to use your team's creative abilities to extend the possibilities.

Consider using creative problem-solving strategies (Parnes, 1997) as shown on the **Brainstorming Worksheet** and **Plan of Action**. Throughout this process their is an emphasis on deliberately alternating between divergent and convergent thinking. Divergent thinking relies on being open to new ideas and deferring judgment. Convergent thinking relies on focusing in and making judgments.

1. For each selected priority (from Step 4), **restate the item in a "IWWMW..." (*In what ways might we...*) question.** For example: "In what ways might we recruit and retain substitute paraeducators?" or "In what ways might we decide if, or when, paraeducator support is needed?"

2. **For each IWWMW... question, "brainstorm" a list of possible solutions** by:
   - Deferring Judgment (don't judge ideas prematurely)
   - Being open to seemingly wild or unconventional ideas
   - Encouraging hitchhiking on ideas
   - Emphasizing the generation of a quantity of ideas (at least 25)
   - Relying on relevant facts to help spur ideas
   - Using metaphors and analogies to generate ideas
   - Using i*dea joggers* (e.g., take a fact of suggestion and make it *bigger, smaller, rearrange it, reverse it, eliminate it, turn it inside out or upside down*)
   - Using forced relationships (looking for connections, similarities, associations, between seemingly unrelated objects or ideas)

Suggested "To Do's" (continued)

3. **Determine a set of criteria** to help your team decide which of the brainstormed possibilities are most suitable for your situation.

   Example Criteria:
   - level of simplicity
   - "do-ability"
   - cost
   - time to enact
   - number of faculty and staff affected
   - number of students affected
   - proposed impact on student learning

4. **Evaluate a subset of your team's most promising ideas** based on the criteria you choose (see grid on Brainstorming Worksheet). You can use whatever scoring scheme makes sense to you (e.g., check marks; plus/minus; rating scale). If you want to you can weight certain criteria if you think they are more important than others. You need not evaluate every idea, just the most promising ones.

5. Use your evaluation of the ideas to help you **select the ideas you will pursue**. Do not use the criteria as a "formula" to make the decision for you, but as a way to guide your evaluation and discussion about what you want to do.

6. Once you have selected one or more of your solutions, **develop a plan of action** that specifies:
   - the priority idea
   - the proposed impact of addressing the priority
   - what will be done (activities/tasks)
   - who will be involved (and in what ways)
   - a timeline for completion of activities/tasks
   - a plan to evaluate whether implementation had its intended impact

1. *In what ways might we* _____

_____

_____

Brainstorming Worksheet

3. Determine Criteria

2. List of Brainstormed Possibilities

4. Evaluate Ideas Using Criteria

5. Select the Ideas to Pursue (indicate by circling)

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1. *In what ways might we* _____

_____

_____

Brainstorming Worksheet

3. Determine Criteria

2. List of Brainstormed Possibilities

4. Evaluate Ideas Using Criteria

5. Select the Ideas to Pursue (indicate by circling)

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1. *In what ways might we* _____

_____

_____

Brainstorming Worksheet

2. List of Brainstormed Possibilities

3. Determine Criteria

4. Evaluate Ideas Using Criteria

5. Select the Ideas to Pursue (indicate by circling)

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Plan of Action

Priority Idea:
What we hope will happen as a result
of taking the actions listed below:

What will be done?	By Whom?	When?

Evaluation: How will we tell if the implementation of our plan is having its intended impact?

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Plan of Action

Priority Idea:
What we hope will happen as a result
of taking the actions listed below:

What will be done?	By Whom?	When?

Evaluation: How will we tell if the implementation of our plan is having its intended impact?

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Plan of Action

Priority Idea:
What we hope will happen as a result
of taking the actions listed below:

What will be done?	By Whom?	When?

Evaluation: How will we tell if the implementation of our plan is having its intended impact?

7. Identify local, regional, and statewide resources to assist in achieving team plans
Local Resources: Regional Resources: Statewide Resources: Other:

8. Implement the team's plan	
Implementation Notes (adjustments, progress, etc.)	
Date	Notes

9. Evaluate the plan's impact and plan next steps

Suggested "To Do's"

1. What information will need to be collected to determine if your team's plan of action is having its intended impact?

2. How will it be collected and from whom?

3. When will the information be collected?

4. Who will organize, analyze, and interpret the information?

5. Summarize the information and review it with the team.

6. Make decisions, based on the information, about what needs to happen next.

****** Attach any relevant reports or information not recorded above ******

10. Report impact and needs to your local school board

Suggested "To Do's"

1. Summarize the impact of implementing your team's plan of action in a brief written report.

2. Share the report with your local school board and other appropriate groups or individuals in the school and community.

3. Cycle through the planning process to continue improving your school's paraeducator services. Revisit team member and make needed changes. Return to your team's previously identified priorities and self-assessment to begin the process of selecting new challenges.

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